



The Stranger Years by creativeminds1896

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Summary: Kris Henderson always knew her little brother Dustin had a fantastical imagination - but nothing as detailed as what he had just described. The girl they found in the woods had superpowers? A monster called a Demogorgon wreaking havoc on Hawkins? Nancy dating douchebag Steve Harrington? Everything seemed to give her a headache nowadays... Steve/OC. Slow burn! Rated T for language!

The Stranger Years

Chapter 1: The Start

"Son of a bitch!"

Dustin Henderson's voice reverberated down the driveway. The echo of his profanity bounced around the open garage, making an older girl with dark blonde, wavy hair bundled up in a ponytail smirk lightly.

She rounded the pile of junk that was *supposed* to be a 1951 Studebaker Champion (unfortunately, there was so much work to be done, the car seemed more like a hunk of metal than an automobile) and wiped her greasy hands on a soiled towel slung over her shoulder.

Dustin wheeled his bicycle down the driveway with a sigh.

"Language, little bro."

The boy rolled his eyes.

"Ah, shit, Kris. You've said worse," he countered, resting his most prized possession against the front porch.

And he was correct. Kristen Henderson was known to have a bit of a foul mouth.

"Yeah, but not around the house," she argued good-naturedly. "Mom would throw a fit if she heard you say that."

"It's a good thing the living room window isn't open then," Dustin nodded, adjusting the backpack hanging off his small frame.

Kris went back to adjusting a part in the front boot of the Champion. "You can say that again."

Her eyes flickered across the machine as she began to tighten a screw.

"How's it coming?" asked Dustin casually.

"The alternator gave me a bit of trouble, but I replaced that already. I tried to jump start the battery, but that thing was dead, so I had to replace that, too. It's unusual for the battery to be completely dead, but this thing is from the fifties, so it's not wholly surprising. I don't know what's going on with this spark plug, but I might have to look at it in the morning before school," she relayed distractedly. "But that might change, too. Who knows. I'm just working my way around this sucker."

Dustin nodded again, watching as his older sister carefully lowered the hood and began to clean up in the garage. He leaned against the frame of the house, arms crossed, as they spoke.

"How was your party campaign?" wondered Kris.

"Totally bad to the bone!" he replied excitedly.

"That rad, huh?"

"To the max! But we didn't finish. Mrs. Wheeler kicked us out."

"She's definitely a stickler for the rules."

The boy scoffed teasingly. "Unlike you."

"Rules are meant to be guidelines, Dusty. Sometimes, in order to achieve the drawing you want, you have to color outside the lines. I'm not against breaking a few eggs to make an omelet, either," she said resolutely.

He sighed. "Tell that to Nancy."

"Trust me, I have."

"She's such a bitch now that she's dating that douchebag Steve Harrington."

"You're preaching to the choir, little bro."

"Please don't date a douchebag, Kris. I wouldn't be able to stand it."

"Neither would I."

She gestured for him to enter the garage. "Can you shut the door? I'm done in here for the night."

Dustin did as he was asked, and even shut the light off on the way in, as Kris constantly forgot to do so.

As the door slammed shut behind them, their mother called.

"Kris? Are you finally done in there?"

"Yes, Ma. Dustin's home, too," she hollered back.

"Hi, Dusty!"

"Hi, Mom!"

"How was the campaign!"

"Excellent!"

"Glad to hear it, dear. Kris, could you bring in that bag of kitty treats for Mews? He's being such a good boy."

The girl rolled her dark blue eyes. "Sure, Ma."

Dustin peered into the icebox as Kris rifled through the cupboard under the sink, pushing aside numerous cat care and cleaning products.

"Are there any leftovers?" Dustin bellowed.

"There's lasagna on the top shelf in a Tupperware!" their mother bellowed back.

"Thanks!"

As Dustin shoved the cold food into the microwave, Kris took the bag of treats out to Mrs. Henderson, who was seated comfortably in a plush armchair. Mews the cat sat on her lap, purring endlessly as she stroked his fur. The television on the stand displayed the movie *Grease*. Kris sighed as 'Greased Lightning' began to play.

She glowered at the feline in distaste as her mother fed him numerous treats.

"Kristen Theresa Henderson, you look like you've been climbing in the chimney!" her mother scolded.

"I might as well have after working on that thing," Kris refuted.

"Is it giving you a lot of trouble?" Mrs. Henderson wondered.

"No more than the usual," said the Henderson girl. "But I like trouble."

Mrs. Henderson sneered. "Yes, well I've known that since you popped out of me."

"Gross, Mom."

"You're always getting into arguments or fights at school! Even in kindergarten!"

"That was 1972."

"And now it's 1983 and you've not changed a bit."

"It's not my fault people are stupid."

"And apparently it's my fault you have no self-control – according to the parents in this town."

"It's called risk, Mom. You can't live life without it."

"Risks are can be avoided, Kristen!"

"Or you can embrace them and really experience the highs and lows of life."

"What kind of logic is that?"

"Mine. And it works for me. It may not for you, but it does for me."

"Hey, Kris, I think my walkie is malfunctioning again!" Dustin chimed in, walking into the living room with a large portion of lasagna. He stopped in his tracks when he saw the displeased expressions on his

family's faces. "What?"

"Can you fix it this time, Dusty?" Kris exasperated. "I'm exhausted."

"Since when do you go to bed at a reasonable time?" he asked, surprised.

"Since the world was round," she quipped.

"No need to be a buzzkill," he muttered.

"I heard that," she countered sharply.

She spun on her heel, annoyed with her mother's reprimanding, and exited the room with a meek "goodnight!" from Dustin.

If there was one thing that Kris and Mrs. Henderson disagreed on, it was the way Kris handled conflict. She was direct. Blunt. Harsh, if need be. She had no problem saying exactly what was on her mind, no matter whether it seemed to hurt the person's feelings. She didn't exactly understand how to connect her emotions with the way she addressed problems and even people. She felt them but didn't know what to do with them.

"Ah, shit!"

Kris awoke to a blinking alarm clock stuck on 12:00.

The power must have gone out last night, she thought, irritated. Stupid alarm clock. I was going to work on the Champion's spark plugs this morning.

She hurriedly leapt out from under her sheets and snatched up random clothing from her bedroom floor – a plain, long sleeved white tee, denim overalls, long white socks, and black Converse All-Stars. She quickly grabbed a colorful scrunchie from her nightstand as she sprinted from her room, down the hall, and into the kitchen.

"Kristen! Are you just now getting up?" asked Mrs. Henderson lightly.

"The frickin' power went out last night, Ma. Alarm didn't go off," she

growled in response.

She grabbed a piece of toast from the stack on the counter and flew by to pick up her book bag from the back of a chair in the living room.

BEEP BEEP!

"That's Barb – I gotta bounce!" she yelled to her mom.

"Have a good day at school, Kristen!" her mother yelled back. "Keep your big yap shut today! No fighting!"

"My big yap says what it wants, Mom! I'm not going on word rations! This isn't communist Russia!" she shot back, pushing her way out the front door.

"Hey, they could be listening! Stop talking about Russia!"

Kris scoffed as the door slammed behind her. She quickly ran to the light blue Volkswagen Beetle sitting by the mailbox. A redhead sat behind the wheel looking amused.

"Hey, slowpoke," she greeted.

"Whatever, Barb," Kris chuckled. "This is like the first time I've been late the whole year."

"Did I hear you compare your mother to Communism?" laughed Barb as she pulled the car away from the curb and onto the road.

"She tries to put me on word rations, Barb," scowled Kris.

This made Barb laugh harder. "Your mom is hilarious."

"Hilariously irritating," Kris jeered, snickering slightly.

"How's that car coming along? What is it called again? A stud-backer?"

"Studebaker Champion. A 1951 Studebaker Champion, to be exact."

"Well excuse me."

"I've told you like four times, Barb."

"I am not a car person. Or a mechanics person. Or a fixing kind of person."

"So what kind of person are you?"

"None of those, that's for sure."

They were silent for a while as they drove through Hawkins, Indiana towards the high school.

As they pulled into the parking lot, Barb spoke up.

"Did you hear from Nancy at all yesterday?"

Kris sighed. "Nope. Not a peep. She was probably waiting for Mr. Douche to call her."

"Kris," Barb scolded as she turned the car off, "you've got to give him a chance. Maybe he's nice to her."

"In what parallel universe? Steve Harrington has been the class dirtbag since our very first day of kindergarten. He was in first grade and he kicked dust into our eyes and called us whiny babies. He still does that now. Nothing has changed," Kris exasperated, stomping out of the Beetle.

"Says the girl who got into a fist fight on the first day of kindergarten – with him. And last month on the soccer field during tryouts when you attacked Jerry Carmichael," Barb pointed out.

"Hey, he told me that a woman's only place was the kitchen and continued to insult our gender. He had it coming."

Barb rolled her eyes as the two walked through the crowded lot into the high school.

"For someone who is so logical, you really make no sense sometimes," Barb replied quietly.

"I heard that," Kris raised her eyebrows.

"Good. You needed to."

"You're just as bad as my brother."

"Your brother is smart, then."

Barb tapped Kris on the shoulder. "There she is."

And there she was. Nancy Wheeler. Perfect, poised Nancy Wheeler. The one who got straight-As. A four-point-oh GPA. The one all the boys thought was cute. The girly-girl.

And then there was Kris. Hot mess Kristen Henderson. Straight Cs. A three-point-oh GPA. The one that was too busy fixing pulling apart machines and putting them back together to worry about boys. A tomboy.

Nancy had made it clear over the years that she much preferred Barb's company over Kris'. But they were stuck. Utterly and completely stuck.

The Wheelers and the Hendersons went back years. Mike and Dustin had been friends forever, making Nancy and Kris childhood friends. The two only associated because of their little brothers. While they were much more kindred spirits while children, the two had grown apart over the years. Their interests were vastly dissimilar – as well as their temperaments. Kris was a spitfire – brutally honest, a risk-taker, unafraid of danger. She was into muscle cars and engines. Nancy was a do-gooder – a rule-follower, quiet, cautious. She was into studying and good grades. The two associated still because of their past. While their past was good, and they connected to it, they were not the same girls they were as children.

"So, did he call?" Barb asked excitedly, falling into step with the shorter brunette.

"Keep your voice down," Nancy warned, smiling.

Kris couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Did he?" Barb pressed, eyes twinkling behind large frames.

"I told you, it's not like that," the Wheeler girl reiterated.

Barb and Kris trailed her to her locker in the main hallway.

Kris cocked an eyebrow. "Then what is it like?"

"Okay, I mean, yes, he likes me. But not like that," Nancy explained.

"So how does he like you?" asked Kris skeptically. "If not *like that*?"

"I don't know," said Nancy casually, "we just...made out a couple times."

There was a hesitant tone to her voice, as if she was afraid of Kris judging her for her actions.

Barb mocked her by putting on a voice. "*We just...made out a couple times.* Nance, seriously, you're going to be so cool now, it's ridiculous."

"Ridiculously awkward," joked Kris. "I mean, come on, Nancy. It's Steven Harrington we're talking about."

"And?" she asked warily.

"This is the idiot that called you a weak-minded wet noodle in eighth grade. Eighth grade," Kris pointed out.

"And them you clobbered him with a dodgeball to the face because you were protecting my honor. Yes, I remember. But he's different now," defended Nancy.

"Different how? A few inches taller, maybe? Less acne?" Kris joked. "He's called the King of Hawkins High, Nancy."

"Like I said – ridiculously cool," Barb reminded them cheerfully.

"No, I'm not," said Nancy bashfully.

"You better still hang out with us, that's all I'm saying," said Barb.

Nancy shot the two a bewildered glance.

Barb sighed. "If you become friends with Tommy H., or Carol —"

"Gag me with a spoon," hissed Kris, shifting her bookbag on her shoulder in disgust.

"Yeah, ew. That's gross," Nancy agreed. "Okay, I'm telling you it was a one-time —"

Barb and Kris shot her a look.

"—two-time thing," the Wheeler girl finished.

The dark-blonde spotted a small wad of paper on the bottom of Nancy's locker. She smirked and plucked it from its place.

"Hey!" Nancy protested.

Kris' brow furrowed as she read the writing. *Meet me. Bathroom. Steve.*

Barb's eyebrows shot up and she smiled as she peered over the blonde's shoulder. "You were saying?"

"What the hell is wrong with this guy?" Kris chuckled.

"He's sweet to me," Nancy objected, annoyed, snatching the note from Kris' hands.

"And a dick to everyone else," argued Kris. "Look, Nance, he may be nice to you, but I'm warning you now – he's going to do the wham, bam, thank you ma'am dance and then he'll bounce. Gone. Blown through that popsicle stand and never looking back."

Nancy huffed and slammed her locker. "Thank you for the concern, Kristen, but why can't you just be happy for me?"

Kris frowned as her mind reeled with data and facts she had picked up from hearing conversations around the school. "How can I be happy for you when there has been a logical pattern of deceit and one night stands on his end?"

"Logical pattern?" gasped Nancy. "Kris, we're talking about my feelings here, not some kind of mathematical equation or scientific

theory. Can you just try to be sensitive towards peoples' feelings for once in your goddamn life?"

The Wheeler girl stomped away without a goodbye while Kris stood there in confusion.

Barb did a slow clap. "Stellar work, Henderson. You've done it again."

Kris was genuinely baffled. "But my logic stands true, Barb. Steve Harrington's reputation proceeds him. He dates a girl here and there, he beds them, then he lets them go like dying autumn leaves in the wind. There is a natural pattern and progression of how he does this."

"And yet you still are completely clueless in the tact department. I agree, trust me, I do. But there are better ways to say it where you don't completely bulldoze Nancy's feelings," Barb reasoned.

"I didn't mean to," Kris told her genuinely.

Barb sighed and hung an arm over the shorter girl's shoulders. "I know you didn't. But that's Kris Henderson charm for you. You really could learn from your brother."

The dark blonde shoved the redhead's arm off. "Put a can on it and keep your hands to yourself, Barbara."

"You should probably apologize."

The two set off down the hall towards their first class.

"For what? For telling her the cold hard facts?"

"For being a bitch."

"Hey, screw you! I was not being a bitch."

"Yeah, you kind of were. When one of your best friends get into a relationship, no matter how crappy the guy, you still have to be kind."

Kris shook her head. "Why? If she wants to be happy, then she should break up with Steve! That's the most logical way to her happiness."

"Dude, you still don't get it," sighed Barb.

"How do I not get it?"

Barb halted in front of a classroom. "I don't have time to explain everything right now, Ms. Robot. I'll talk to you after class."

Kris shook her head again as she watched Barb enter her classroom.

"How do I not get it?"

"Trust me, Kris. Sometimes I wonder how you survived this long without emotion."

I have emotion, thought Kris bitterly. I just don't know how to show that I do.

Nancy didn't speak with Kris for the rest of the day. Even when Barb gave them both a ride home, the Wheeler girl didn't even bother saying goodbye.

"What did I say about apologizing, Kris?" Barb lectured as they drove down the hill to the Henderson household.

Kris sputtered. "I tried, okay? She didn't want to hear it."

"She's just stubborn. She'll come around."

"I don't think that's true, actually."

"Oh come on, Kris. You guys have been friends since like the fifth grade. Five years! That's a long time. She can't end a friendship over one misunderstanding."

"It wasn't a misunderstanding, Barb. She doesn't want to accept the truth. When she does, she'll thank me."

The redhead scoffed. "For what? Saying 'I told you so'?"

Kris shrugged. "Why not?"

"Dude, you really need to learn tact," Barb chuckled.

"Tact is for children. In my opinion, if you want to say something, then say it. It's better to have candor than to hold back and get walked over like some dingy door mat," argued Kris.

Barb shook her head slowly as she pulled up to the house.

"I'll see you tomorrow, dingus," she said.

Kris laughed. "Whatever, Barb. See you tomorrow."

She jumped out of the Volkswagen and made her way up the front drive as Barb drove quickly away.

As soon as she had crossed the threshold of her home, Mrs. Henderson barged up to her in a panic.

"Kristen, Will Byers is missing!"

The dark blonde's brow furrowed. "Mom? What? Will?"

"He left the Wheelers' last night and never made it home. They have a search party going tonight for the poor boy. Dustin just got home. He's very upset."

Kris was upset, too. She was fond of the young Byers boy. He was gentle and kind and always made sure to say hello.

She was reminded of just a few months ago during the summer when Will stopped by to check in on Dustin.

"Hello? Kris?" called a high-pitched voice.

The Henderson girl frowned and wheeled herself out from under the 1967 Chevy Impala. Her face was spotted with grease from the underside of the vehicle.

Her eyes found Will Byers standing outside the garage leaning on his bike. He had what looked like comics in his hand.

"Heya, Will," Kris greeted. "What's shaking?"

The small boy smiled. "Mike and Lucas said Dustin was pretty sick. I

brought him some of his old comics he let me borrow."

Kris smiled and stood, wiping her hands. "Yeah, come on in. I would take them, but I don't think Dustin wants liquid car on his reading material."

Will grinned back and set his bicycle by Dustin's, then followed the older girl into the house.

"I'll be in the garage," she told her mother quickly, going around her to put on her work clothes.

"You're not going to go comfort your baby brother?" her mother asked, shocked.

"He'll come find me when he's ready to be helped," Kris replied firmly, hurrying towards her room.

"Helped? What do you mean helped?!"

"You'll see, Ma."

Thunder rumbled.

Kris had stopped her work on the Studebaker glance at the darkening sky.

Dustin had yet to come out of his room.

Their mother hadn't pushed the two any further for interaction that evening.

The older girl had taken a break earlier to complete minimal homework but hadn't eaten since arriving at home that afternoon. She wasn't sure Dustin had, either.

Suddenly, she heard the quiet creaking of the front door.

She peered around the corner to see Dustin sneaking out, cap pulled low over his eyes.

"Where do you think you're going, James Bond?" she whispered at

him.

He flinched and grabbed his heart. "Kris, you scared the shit outta me!"

"Better go change your big boy panties then, huh?" she joked. "Where the hell do you think you're going? The search party ended hours ago."

"I know, but Lucas, Mike, and I think we can find him."

"If fifty adults can't find one eleven-year-old, then how can three other eleven-year-olds do any better?"

"Because Will is my friend. We know him better than anybody."

Kris sighed. She knew her brother had made a logical point. "If you're sneaking out, you better be back by two. Mom always gives Mews extra food to last the night at two. She's gonna know you're gone then."

Dustin grinned his toothless grin. "Really? You're letting me off?"

"Clean as a whistle, Gummy Bear. Now get."

"Stop calling me Gummy Bear!" he hissed. "Cleidocranial Dysplasia is not a joke!"

"Jokes are all about perspective, Gummy."

"I'm leaving now."

"See ya, Gummy Bear."

"Get lost, Greased Lightning."

"Jerk."

"Asshole."

"Language!"

And with that, he pedaled off into the night.

Kris smirked mischievously as she watched him go. She wasn't about to let him off the hook that easily – especially if a kid was missing.

Dressed in only her high-waisted denim work shorts, a plain black t-shirt, and her Converse mechanic shoes, she threw on her blue and yellow slicker and grabbed her old racing bike. She wasn't about to let him go off on his own.

The night air was cold, but heavy. It blew back her straight-across-the-forehead bangs as she rode. Goosebumps formed on her legs, and she shivered. Kris could sense that rain would be pounding on her head soon. She was thankful for the hood on her rain slicker.

She followed Dustin from a distance – far enough that he wouldn't be able to see her without a flashlight. He, on the other hand, was quite easy to track, as he and his friends use the small headlights on their bikes to see. They created a nice path for her to trail along behind. Their voices carried down the road. She caught snippets of their conversation, mostly about Will and being able to find him, as she wheeled along.

Finally, they came to a stop on the side of the road that led to Will's home.

She came to a squeaky stop, hoping they didn't notice the sound of her brakes and mentally noting to oil the mechanism as soon as she got home.

Lightning flashed across the sky as thunder reared its ugly head. A few drops fell onto the pavement, hissing lightly against the humid ground.

Kris observed as the boys conversed, most likely bickering, then switched on their flashlights and trudged into the thick forest.

Rain began to fall steadily as the older girl rode towards her brother's bike, parked it next to his, and went in the same direction the three boys had walked towards.

She easily caught up to them – her legs were much longer than theirs. However, she still kept her distance.

Rain pelted them like bullets, even through the thick tree canopy.

Kris shivered as the rain soaked her bare legs, socks, and shoes. She regretted not wearing her work jeans instead of her shorts.

The boys shouted through the sound of pounding rain.

"Will!"

"Byers!"

"I've got your X-Men 134!" Dustin screamed. "Guys, I really think we should head back."

Kris couldn't help herself. "I've got to agree with Dusty."

The three boys seemed to jump out of their own skin. All of them shrieked and Lucas even dropped his flashlight. Dustin's shined directly in her eyes. She squinted due to the brightness, but grinned at them nonetheless.

"What the hell, Kris!" Dustin chastised. "That's the second time today! Stop it! I should have had mom chain you to that stupid car of yours!"

"Dude, you could have scared off Will!" Lucas protested.

Kris walked closer and stood nearer to the boys, so she wouldn't have to shout. "If anyone was going to scare off Will, it'd be Mike. Dude, you're paler than a ghost."

"Yeah, that's because of you, Kris! You gave me a heart attack!" the Wheeler boy snarked angrily.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Dustin repeated.

"I wasn't going to let you idiots look for Will all alone! What if his murderer is still on the loose? Someone has to tell the police about your deaths," joked Kris awkwardly.

"Would you shut up? This is serious," Mike chided. "We're worried about him."

Kris sighed deeply. "Yes, I know, Michael. I am, too. But it makes no sense for you guys to be out here alone right now. It's not safe."

Lucas and Mike rolled their eyes at the older girl, whirled around, and continued to search.

"Kris is right, guys! It's not safe," reasoned Dustin nervously, falling back into step with them.

Kris nodded, following. Her bangs stuck flat to her forehead.

"You wanna be a baby? Go home already! Listen to your stupid sister!" Lucas lectured.

"I'm not telling you to go home, Lucas! I'm telling you to be smart about looking for him! This isn't the time! It's dark, it's raining, and visibility is low! The chance of finding him in this state is little to none! I'm leaning towards none!" she argued.

"We're trying to be realistic, Lucas!" Dustin remonstrated.

"No, you guys are being big sissies!" retorted Lucas.

Kris just groaned and walked beside her little brother.

There was a moment of silence.

"Did you ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And we have no weapons or anything?" Dustin thought aloud.

"Dustin, shut up. Your sister is basically a human weapon, anyways. We're fine," Mike snapped.

"I'm just saying, does that seem smart to you?"

"Shut up, shut up!"

Suddenly, there was rustling in the damp foliage up ahead.

Kris shoved her brother behind her, taking his flashlight from his hand in an instant.

"Hey!" he griped.

"Shut up!" she and Lucas said in unison.

"Did you guys hear that?" Mike questioned anxiously.

SNAP! CRACK! SNAP!

Somehow, the rustling seemed to come from all directions. The four looked all around, screeching and jumping at the noises.

Then, Mike's flashlight hit something. Something alive. Something yellow.

Something human.

It was a kid. A bad kid with no shoes and no coat. Rainwater streamed down the kid's face like small waterfalls.

Dustin, Kris, Lucas, and Mike froze. They had a stare off with the kid.

Kris was the first to speak, but her voice was hoarse.

"What. The. Hell."

I hope you enjoyed the first chapter of The Stranger Years! I based the title off the show 'The Wonder Years.' I thought it might be kind of fun.

Anyways, if you liked the first chapter, please leave a review and give this a follow! I'd like to know if you want to read more of Kris Henderson. I had a lot of fun creating her character and I have to say my favorite thing about this chapter is her dynamic with Dustin. Hopefully I'll post another chapter soon! :)